



A Brief Study of The Jiroft Style Stone Artefact

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Introduction

Jiroft is an early Bronze Age civilization (3rd millennium BC) came by accident during 2000 when series of heavy flood along the Halil River led to the discovery of many artifacts. Several unscientific and irrational soft stone artefacts excavated illegally between 2001-2002 and thousands of Jiroft style stone artefacts appeared in western auctions, galleries and museums in cities such as London (Piran S. (ed.) 2013, Madjidzadeh Y. 2003)¹. This research is looking at some selected Jiroft style objects² to examine and conclude their classifications based on manufacturing techniques or their pattern, this aims to classify them for further research in the future. The authenticity of objects in market challenged by quality measurements which classified at this research and makes it easier to identify them. In addition to this, this research will focus on examining and assessing the materials used to make the Jiroft style stones. Through the past years in different part of the areas some objects collected and tested for X-ray diffraction analyses along with microscopy³ (Kohl P.L. 1979, Emami M, Razani M, Soleimani A.N, Madjidzadeh Y, 2017). There are several types of objects show similarities in manufacturing technique, decorative motifs, material and shapes and to analyse them. According to Majidzadeh: *"Those stone vases 1. Weren't fabricated in series; 2. In all probabilities they had been produced neither in one single workshop nor by one single craftsman; 3. There was not fixed rules for the workshops of the region to co-ordinate the size or the shape of the vase with the subject of the decoration"* (Piran S. (ed.) 2013). This research also challenges topics around stone objects, for those which were in markets and those that were collected from smuggled back in 2002 and attempts to compare some of them in order reach to a sensible conclusion. This article can also, assist for further research about Jiroft stone in the future in terms of authenticity and style classifications.

¹ London is capital of selling antiquity followed by Paris

² Also artefacts including from galleries and auctions for the first time

³ Analyse the structure of crystalline materials



1.0 Quality And Authenticity Measurements of Jiroft Style In Markets

Back in 2005 there was a challenge report written by Oscar White Muscarella and he urged that numbers of objects in Majidzadeh's catalogue was fake (Muscarella W.O. 2005) and it was responded appropriately by Holly Pitaman and Yousef Madjidzadeh by a written report published 2008 (Pittman H, Madjidzadeh Y. 2008). In fact there are fake artefacts in the antiquity market but not ones resented in the catalogue. A technique to identify forged, looted and authentic Jiroft style stones are explained below. It is essential to apply these measurements for identifying Jiroft style stone object. In order to recognise forged objects, it is important to know the reason behind this action and manner, and who their targeted customers are? An excellent work forgers measure every possible ways to style objects in a more convincing way and the selling price should cover the effort and only expert can identify the fakes (Lehmann, E. (2017, Jan 13)).

1. **Measurement 1 (Fakes):** Several artefacts that are in market are blatantly fake and there are no sign of natural weathering. In addition, many parts of the styles are not matching to the artefacts compared to the Madjidzadeh's catalogue (and example of imaginary artefact can be seen fig 1.3.7). This process is significantly lower, for example a few online auction start as low as \$1⁴. The question is who would be buying those low-priced objects? The research has shown that galleries will purchase those items for their new customers, also not many people are concerned to buy fake objects and it would rather act as a souvenir and there are thousands of these in the market (Anon, 2018), which have (or are valued between) selling prices between £100 - £1000.
2. **Measurement 2 (Old collection and looted from Jiroft)-** Another group of artefacts identified in the market are those with almost medium to high quality style. All the required standard measurements including motif, shape, style, colour (there are different shades of colours but there are mostly grey with sign of original colour of black), size and their "natural" worn condition. Their motifs and shapes are authentic but with exceptionally poor provenance and the chances that those objects are looted/old collection rather forged are high (maybe a little looted prior to 2000 also, possible fake maybe considered at this category). The dealer/collector sells them on auctions (via third parties), and they will be purchased by galleries or private collectors or even museums (Lehmann, E. (2017, Jan 13)). Selling categories £1,000-£15,000 depending on quality and provenance⁵.
3. **Measurement 3 (extraordinarily high quality looted from Jiroft)-** Other types of objects in the market are those which are costly. Auctions such as Bonham, Christies and Sothebys have sold 6 those high quality artefact 7. There are also some objects in this categorised in this measurements which are high in quality but sell in lower price, as shown in fig 1.1 [In here, you could also see not so expensive artefact 8, such as fig .1.1 which was a unique artefact. The artefact was high in quality 9 which is sold with much lower price.] Antiquities that are high in quality, are highly likely came from southern Iran (Mahtoutabad cemetery) (Desset F, Vidale M, Soleimani A.N, Battistella E, Daneshi A. 2017)¹⁰The selling categories

⁴ Online auctions such as <https://www.catawiki.com/c/3-antiques> there are many others.

⁵ Auctions such as TimeLine, Chiswick and even Bonham

⁶ You can find all past sales in their online archive by typing chlorite or Bacteria. They never sale with the name of Jiroft as they know it's illegal

⁷ Under name of Bacteria or western Asiatic never used Jiroft or Kerman

⁸ Measurement 2 category can also, see in top auctions in London

⁹ There is a similar artefact in Jiroft museum but it's eagle figure

¹⁰ Maybe coming from the specific cemetery back during 2000-2002. Mahtoutabad cemetery are famous for their high quality



in auctions and galleries start from as little as £10,000 up to unknown price . In some certain cases an auction started as little as £1,000.¹¹

This research highly implies that, decent fakes are in chlorite colour(different shades of Green/Gray), furthermore also, the poor fakes are varying in materials or even can be chlorite and there are in different shades of colours from light green to the dark grey or even brown (Anon, 2018). The past studies have shown that, the authentic artefacts are not always in chlorite (Kohl P.L. 1979)¹², it can be any types of metamorphic rock types. Indeed, major research and investigations are required in this field.

1.0.1 Jiroft Style Stone Objects Selling Periods

According to the records, the selling periods are dates back as far as 2001(Madjidzadeh Y. 2003, Jiroft). The selling Jiroft style objects are lowered gradually by 2019. The record of selling starts 2001 at auctions moreover it is an precise same year of discovery of Jiroft (Christies. 2001. Christies Sold lots). Thousands of looted objects take several years to sell. There could be a record of selling before 2001 but it is not available in their auctions archive. From 2006 internet was started a major invention to advertise and communicate looters to the galleries and start selling the objects. The social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, eBay, Amazon, WhatsApp and many others has made it simple for looters to directly seek latent buyers, every so often sending messages to members of antiquities groups on Facebook and other sites (Smithsonian magazine . 2017) . Fig 1.4 displays the assumed periods of selling Jiroft style object in the market from 2001 to 2020.

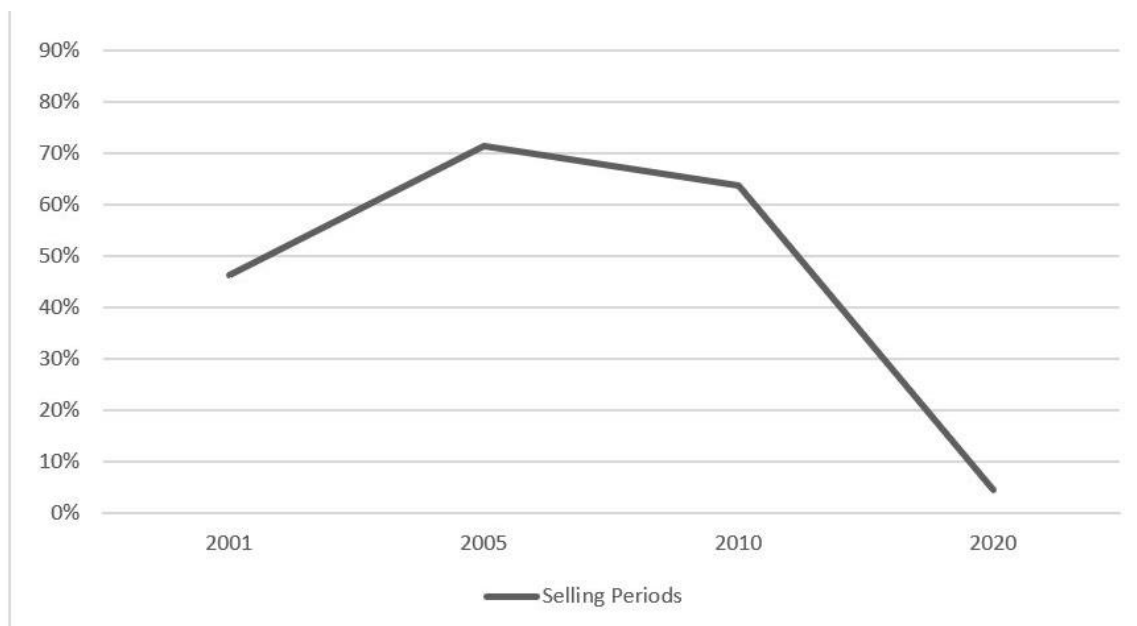


Fig 1.4 Assumed estimation period of selling Jiroft style objects in the London antiquity market

¹¹ In some cases seen even lower price, it looks like the seller wanted to sell it as quickly as possible with hoping to see high bids in auctions.

¹² I don't think every object tested the hardness so it can safely say soft to medium rock



1.1 Material

For years believed, the soapstone, steatite or chlorite make use for Intercultural style (Jiroft style) (Kohl P.L. 1979, Piran S. 2020). Recently, there were XRD test performed on some archaeological fragments from archaeological site of Jiroft. It has confirmed that the type of stones used, was chlorite schist (Emami M, Razani M, Soleimani A.N, Madjidzadeh Y, 2017). Also, back in the 1970's for Yahya excavation numbers of XRD tests were performed on 379 objects in order to identify the type of the stones manufactured. The identified stones were mostly Chlorite, also Muscovite schist and Phlogopite were reported (Kohl P.L. 1979). It is not the best practice to use a single term for all the object discoveries to group them and each individual artefact not been tested yet. Major tests are yet to be done in Iranian Plateau, Persian Gulf zone (South Arabia, Tarut) and Mesopotamian sites such as Soch in Central Asia and Mohenjo-daro in the Indus Valley (Piran S. 2020)¹³. It cannot be certainly concluded that all objects made by chlorite since there were other materials used to manufactured Jiroft style artefacts. However, it is wise to say that the Jiroft artefact was discovered and tested as Chlorite schist. It is highly likely the Jiroft stones made from different types of soft to mid stones and are mostly made from metamorphic rock type. It depends on each region, that what type of rock they have used to manufacture those objects. A key research needs to be done in this area and it will contrarily challenge the researchers. Furthermore, a general term of "soft stones" can be used instead of chlorite.

1.2 Classifications of Stone Artefacts

There were different types of objects discovered and collected in Jiroft in terms of manufacturing technique, decorative motifs, shapes and material. Also, it is undetected two objects with identical features (Madjidzadeh Y. 2003), we may find similar artefact nonetheless but not the same in terms of manufacturing techniques such as crafting and styling of stone. The artefact should be grouped in terms of quality, style, and crafts, so no appropriate testing has been done on material. There are many artefacts collected and also a few studies suggested that each manufacturer could apply several techniques (Piran S. 2020). For these reasons, one object picked an example for each group of classification. The table below only represents the main categories for each object and there can be sub-categories based on their quality and the material they used. The subcategories are not covered for this research. The calcifications are divided into four main categories and it can be any form of sizes and scales.

1. Centred frame,
2. Full frame,
3. Multi frame (two or additional framed)
4. Semi centred frame

¹³ Jiroft style object discovered outside of Iranian plateau. Those objects need to be test for further study.







Classification ¹⁴	Item Description	Classification Info	Notes
<u>Centred frame</u> 	This was for sale in London auction ¹⁵ [Measurement 2]. The styles and material is very similar to one in louvre museum and one in national Museum of Iran. There are few artefacts with same quality and pattern identified with different motifs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divided by line(s) at top and other line(s) at bottom. - The motif framed in middle. - This technique is not only limited to vases. - They are in different scales and sizes. 	These kind of artefact along with other similar objects are probably manufactured in same region within the same period of times.
<u>Full frame</u> 	This artefact was from Barakat Gallery [Measurement 2]. The style and motif are very similar to those in Madjidzadeh 's catalogue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no line on object - Just full frame motif - This technique is not only limited to vases. - They are in different scales and sizes. - The design is from end to end. 	The snake and the mouth of this object is almost identical to the fig 1.3.2.1. It was selling in one of the London's gallery. Also, the colour of the object indicate that the material is also may look the same.
<u>Multi frame</u> 	One of the many artefact from Madjidzadeh 's catalogue. Divided by lines one frame on top with smaller scale and other on bottom with larger scale. Also, there are three or even four frame's discovered with different scales and sizes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divided by line(s), there can be more than two frames - This technique is not only limited to vases. - They are in different scales and sizes. 	Some of the artefact are thicker than others and this seems to be one of them.
<u>Semi centred frame</u> 	Another artefact from Madjidzadeh's catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divided by line(s) on top. - The frame is beneath the lines. - This technique is not only limited to vases. - They are in different scales and sizes. 	

fig 1.2

¹⁴ The full classification with their sub categories will be available at www.persianwonders.com in some point this year.

¹⁵ 1 kg, 13.5cm (5 1/4"). Property of a London gentleman; formerly with Mr Claude Boisgirard, Paris, 13-14 February 2002, lot 399; part of a family collection since the 1970s; accompanied by a copy of the auction page and the original French Archaeological Passport number 045931, dated 4 April 2002

1.3 Jiroft style Antiquities In Market

Many years of dedication done to research more about Jiroft objects in auctions, galleries and museums which were sold by the name of “Bacteria” in the market. Over the years, I have collected a few photos and probably for the first time to demonstrate the objects in different galleries and auctions and explain why a few of them considered authentic and several are not. Please note, these are based on my current research, self-experience and talked to the different experts (Anon, 2015–2019). The list of fake objects are endless below are just a few from many.

1.3.1 Measurement 1

These objects are fake starting from low quality to the high quality in this category of measurements. fig 1.3.1 Bactria chlorite cup/vessel with carved scenes for price of £199.99 with no provenance and claimed to be an antiquity. The fig 1.3.2 is another auction sell starting price of \$1 fig 1.3.3 . It clearly shows they have access to the Madjidzadeh’s catalogue and aim to produce different type of multi frame object with their original black colour. However, with close glance at the colour underneath the green colour of the chlorite would be noticeable. No antiquity in the world start with price of \$1. The fig 1.3.2 has improved quality than the fig 1.3.1 and it considered mid quality fake in measurement 1 category.



fig 1.3.1



fig 1.3.2

Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 16:50:42	€ 333
Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 16:50:05	€ 289
Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 16:49:21	€ 267
Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 16:48:08	€ 245
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:59:15	€ 200
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:59:02	€ 180
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:58:52	€ 170
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:56:43	€ 160
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:43:20	€ 150
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:38:54	€ 140
Bidder 6509	03-10-2018 15:38:35	€ 130
Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 14:53:07	€ 120
Bidder 9228	03-10-2018 14:52:57	€ 101
Bidder 9228	02-10-2018 08:22:27	€ 93
Bidder 9228	01-10-2018 13:14:22	€ 79
Bidder 9228	01-10-2018 13:14:15	€ 74
Bidder 9228	01-10-2018 08:29:02	€ 66
Bidder 0405	28-09-2018 16:10:28	€ 1

fig 1.3.3



fig 1.3.4



fig 1.3.5



fig 1.3.6¹⁶



fig 1.3.7¹⁷



Another \$1 starting bid but sold for £1000 as this is the high-quality fake in measurement 1 category. This object is clearly adapted from Madjidzadeh’s category as they know the back of the object has holes fig 1.3.5¹⁸

¹⁶ A very poor fake identified during collected artefact from smuggled in Iran. Photo by Mehdi Razani,

¹⁷ Imaginary Jiroft objects in sell in ebay for price of £1,500

¹⁸ Description: Carved in the shape of the mythical scorpion-man with human head and scorpion body (tail missing), his arms and hands in the shape of the scorpion front claws.

1.3.2. Measurement 2

The first fig 1.3.2.1 occurs from gallery in London, decent quality however there not the highest quality compared to the measurement 3. And these kinds of objects remain similar motif to Madjidzadeh's catalogue however in different artistic style not an exact copy¹⁹ with inlaid gem/white marble stones on eyes. The fig 1.3.2.2 ²⁰, the similar motif can tell in Madjidzadeh's catalogue also it is almost similar to the artefact in university of Pennsylvania museum with different size and shape. fig 1.3.2.3 sold at auction for £4,500,²¹ all with poor provenance which it raises concern that, all may be looted rather old collection. (Please see appendix for measurement 2 and for further photos) . The objects are in the measurement 2 category with their medium-high quality, may came from cemeteries such as Ghallehkuchak, Ghareghato and Ghalegang.²²



fig 1.3.2.1



fig 1.3.2.2



fig 1.3.2.3



fig 1.3.2.6²³

1.3.3. Measurement 3

The objects are in the measurement 3 category with their high to exceptional quality, may came almost certainly from Mahtoutabad cemetery. For further photos Please see appendix for measurement 3



fig 1.3.2.4²⁴



fig 1.3.2.5²⁵

¹⁹ From a gallery based in South Kensington, London. The size and motif is very similar to the Madjidzadeh's catalogue but with medium quality and the provenance was 1970's and it came to the UK prior to 2000 also it was before the catalogue of Madjidzadeh 's was printed out. Greyish colour

²⁰ This is 3kg in weigh and it was a large vase and it seems to be made from chlorite schist. Greenish colour.

²¹ From Chiswick auction in London. high quality and it was small in size and it is two sided idol and the colour suggested the material is chlorite. Greenish colour

²² It's just a though that as objects from Mahtoutabad cemetery are exceptional quality, therefore the medium to high quality object may come from these following looted cemeteries Ghallehkuchak, Ghareghato and Ghalegang.

²³ From Bonham auctions in Measurement 2



Conclusion

Until the present, those are tested artefacts are in metamorphic rock type and there are mostly Chlorite. A few researches reported with different types of stone and there are several Jiroft styles stones artefact yet need to be discovered in different regions. The Phyllosilicates type stone manufactured to produce the objects are tested are in two groups; 1) Mica group (as there are few objects identified as Muscovite schist and Phlogopite in Tarut island) 2) Chlorite group. The XRD test in Tarut shows all stones with different materials come from different places mainly from Iran. The X-ray diffraction analyse of 375 soft stone specimens in southwestern Asia demonstrates that the stones from Tarut island were made from several distinctive minerals such as pure chlorite, chlorite talc, chlorite-quartz and also, chlorite Andradite (hardness is 6.5). This dose clearly suggested that the use of chlorite term for all Jiroft objects are questionable as all objects have never been tested, also we are not sure of the hardness of these stones. In general, it is almost impossible to test each stone object for variety of reasons. The safe phrase would be to call these types of stones is “soft stone”. If the type of any stones identifies, subsequently, the confirmed type of the stone can be accurately specified for the specific object that has been tested. Further and major study need to be done to identify workshop that worked on different types of metamorphic rock and their styles used to create these objects. According to Holly Pittman regards to the Jiroft style stone from Jiroft; “Obviously there are many things from Jiroft that are made from stones that are not chlorite. But the so called Jiroft style objects are usually/always made of Chlorite” (Pittman, 2018) .

My hypothetical thoughts are as follows; The quality of the objects is varies, however certain objects are extremely well carved could be looted from Mahtoutabad cemetery (Desset F, Vidale M, Soleimani A.N, Battistella E, Daneshi A. 2017), and should be looted from Jiroft after 2000. Another suggestion is, those with higher quality could be from the last centuries productions or crafted by masters. As Madjidzadeh's was mentioned “In all probabilities they had been produced neither in one single workshop nor by one single craftsman” (Madjidzadeh Y. 2003) maybe just it is correct that we are seeing several different type of qualities by different craftsman as they were not copying from each other design but in fact they followed the same pattern. There must have been kind of epic mythology among of that vanished civilization, something like Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia.

In terms of authenticity of antiquities in market, in overall there are more fakes in circulation than authentic. According to the latest news from British museum “It is easier and cheaper to produce copies than it is to hire dozens of workers to look for originals. Therefore, it is highly risky to loot archaeological sites in Iran, the death penalty has been awarded for such offences as they are considered such serious breaches of national antiquity laws.”(The British Museum. 2020) Although, this was not a case for Jiroft in that time as there were thousands of objects looted from Jiroft and sold in markets (table 1.4). In terms of authenticity of the Jiroft artefacts, the high chances there were looted appeared in auctions and galleries rather fake in market. However, more recently there are several fakes appearing in the market (as selling looted Jiroft object in market are almost end, please refer to the table 1.4) and chances are in the near future we will realize high quality mass production of Jiroft style in market but the market for Jiroft stones artefacts it is still not there yet.

It presumes that as forgers need to find the potential customers and evaluate the market in order to put effort to forge Jiroft style stone artefacts. As research become stronger around the Jiroft stone artefact the fakes can come to be more believable in terms of quality in the future (as they can reach and study the future papers). Similar case can be seen with different artefacts from Egypt and Roman in the market. The more mature the research becomes, the higher quality artefact can be

²⁴ At Bonham sold for £2,750

²⁵ Auctioned for £15,000



seen in market. Also, the research and finding demonstrate that, there is not any fake Jiroft artefact in both The British museum and Louvre museum. Though, there are cheap fake Jiroft style in the market (measurement 1). Although, slight number of measurement 2 and 3 objects in galleries are displayed but less of them are appearing in London auctions recently compared to the previous years. If the market continues this way, we will not see much forgery in the future as there will be no demands. Another thought is that looted objects are not only from southern Iran, they may come from as far as Afghanistan. Additionally, the objects might have been looted well before 2000, as a little provenance of objects in galleries are pre 2000 if decide to trust the provenance ²⁶.

Finally, the classifications of the Jiroft styles (fig 1.2) at this research can certainly help the future research with a defined sub classification in order to narrow them down more precisely for covering the artistic style and even the materials.

²⁶ Spoke to one of the galleries in London and insist that some of their object was came to UK prior to 2000 with some paper evidence! Can you believe them I leave it to you to decide.



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Appendix

Measurement 2 - Other Selected Jiroft Style Stone From Market

Below are the list of Measurement 2 and 3 (not fake) in the market along with the year was auctioned. The starting auction price are ranges from £1,000 to £70,000. Prices are depends on Provence, quality and rarity. I think the earlier dates are coming straight from southern Iran like those sold in Christies and they were all selling under WESTERN ASIATIC BACTRIAN. The below are just selected artefacts unfortunately there are several can still find in their archive and there are galleries still selling Jiroft style artefacts.

Timeline auction London Mayfair 22 may 2018



Timeline auction London Mayfair 21 February 2018



Timeline auction London Mayfair 22 November 2017

543 grams, 17cm (6 3/4"). Condition Fine condition, repaired. Rare. Provenance: Private collection, London, UK; formerly with Christie's, South Kensington, 13 May 2003, lot 12; from an important family collection formed 1970s-1980s Footnotes Vessels made from steatite or chlorite have frequently been found at early to mid-third millennium BC ([Timelineauctions. 2010](https://www.timelineauctions.com/))





WESTERN ASIATIC BACTRIAN CARVED VESSEL 2nd millennium BC A carved schist vase

Provenance: From an important London, W1, collection; acquired 1960-1980s.

3.6 kg, 28cm (11") ([Timelineauctions. 2010](#))



Measurement 2 - Chiswick auction 14 September 2016

Provenance: UK collection, London, acquired in the late 1980s.



Sold at London auction pannier with no provenance and sold as a set. The photo on right is from a gallery in London compared to the photo in bellow at national museum of Iran



From national Museum of Iran

Measurement 3 - Christies London south Kensington 13 may 2003



Left: Christies New York 8 June 2001 – Right: Christies London south Kensington 15 may 2002

